NCA
VOC FOR PSM/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-6231 OCTOBER 30, 1978
DOUGLAS ROBERTS/ATHENS

ARAB SUMMIT

ANNCR:

ARAB FOREIGN MINISTERS OPENED TALKS IN BAGHDAD MONDAY IN PREPARATION FOR A SUMMIT CONFERENCE CALLED BY IRAQ TO CHART A JOINT PLAN OF ACTION TO OPPOSE THE CAMP DAVID FRAMEWORK FOR PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST. VOA'S DOUGLAS ROBERTS HAS A BACKGROUND REPORT.

VOICE:

WHEN IRAQ PROPOSED THE SUMMIT AT THE END OF SEPTEMBER, FEW OBSERVERS BELIEVED THE MEETING WOULD ACTUALLY BE HELD. IRAQ'S RADICAL LEADERS HAD BEEN UNABLE OR UNWILLING TO JOIN FORCES WITH OTHER HARD-LINE ARAB STATES, LET ALONE REACH AN UNDERSTANDING WITH THE MORE MODERATE GOVERNMENTS.

BUT A HOST OF IRAQI ENVOYS TOURED ARAB CAPITALS REPORTEDLY URGING PARTICIPATION IN THE SUMMIT, AND AT THE SAME TIME, BAGHDAD BEGAN EFFORTS TO END A LONG, BITTER AND SOMETIMES BLOODY FEUD WITH NEIGHBORING SYRIA, LEADER OF THE ARAB FRONT OPPOSED TO EGYPTIAN PEACE MOVES. THOSE EFFORTS CULMINATED WITH THE APPARENTLY SUCCESSFUL OUTCOME OF LAST WEEK'S MEETING BETWEEN THE IRAQI AND SYRIAN PRESIDENTS. THEN CAME THE NEWS THAT SAUDI ARABIA AND ITS OIL-RICH GULF ALLIES HAD ALSO AGREED TO ATTEND THE BAGHDAD SUMMIT.

THE FOREIGN MINISTERS BEGAN MONDAY TO DRAFT RESOLUTIONS AND AN AGENDA FOR THE HEADS OF STATE WHO ARE DUE TO MEET ON THURSDAY. ABU IYAD, A LEADING FIGURE IN THE PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANIZATION, SET FORTH SOME BASIC GOALS FOR THE SUMMIT IN A BEIRUT MAGAZINE INTERVIEW PUBLISHED MONDAY, GOALS THAT SEEM TO BE IN LINE WITH POLICIES OUTLINED BY HARD-LINE ARAB GOVERNMENTS.

THE P.L.O. OFFICIAL SAID THE SUMMIT SHOULD REJECT THE CAMP DAVID AGREEMENTS AND TAKE A CLEAR-CUT POSITION AGAINST EGYPT'S PRESIDENT ANWAR SADAT, THE ONE ARAB LEADER WHO WILL NOT BE ATTENDING THE BAGHDAD CONFERENCE.

ARAB REACTION TO THE CAMP DAVID ACCORDS HAS FALLEN INTO SEVERAL CATEGORIES. HARD-LINE GOVERNMENTS HAVE TOTALLY REJECTED THEM; TWO ARAB STATES -- SUDAN AND OMAN -- HAVE PUBLICLY SUPPORTED THE AGREEMENTS; JORDAN, SAUDI ARABIA AND OTHER GULF STATES HAVE EXPRESSED RESERVATIONS ABOUT THE ACCORDS, BUT HAVE ALSO PRAISED AMERICAN EFFORTS FOR PEACE AND PLEDGED THEMSELVES TO A CONTINUING DIALOGUE AIMED AT A COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT OF THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT.

VIRTUALLY, ALL MODERATE ARAB GOVERNMENTS HAVE MADE ONE THING VERY CLEAR -- THEY WILL NOT CONDONE ANY MOVES AT THE BAGHDAD SUMMIT DESIGNED TO ISOLATE EGYPT OR OSTRACIZE PRESIDENT SADAT. BUT IRAQ, SYRIA, AND OTHERS IN THE HARD-LINE FRONT HAVE ALREADY BRANDED THE EGYPTIAN LEADER A TRAITOR TO THE ARAB CAUSE.

WITH THESE DIFFERENCES IN MIND, SOME OBSERVERS FORESEE STORMY DEBATE AT THE MEETING IN THE IRAQI CAPITAL. MANY EGYPTIAN ANALYSTS ARE PREDICTABLY DECLARING THAT THE SUMMIT IS DOOMED TO FAILURE. JUST WHAT WILL EMERGE FROM THE TALKS IN BAGHDAD'S PALACE OF PEACE REMAINS TO BE SEEN. VIRTUALLY ALL CONCERNED HAVE STRESSED THE NEED TO RESTORE ARAB SOLIDARITY. BUT, BEYOND THAT LONG-STANDING GOAL, THERE IS CLEARLY A WIDE RANGE OF OPINION IN THE ARAB WORLD AS TO WHAT THE SUMMIT SHOULD OR SHOULD NOT ACCOMPLISH.

GH/PY